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Brianna T. Ellison

Texas Tech University, brianna.ellison@ttu.edu

Bobbi C. Padgett

Texas Tech University, bobbi.padgett@ttu.edu

Deborah Clay Fowler

Texas Tech University, deborah.fowler@ttu.edu

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Brianna T. Ellison, Bobbi C. Padgett, Deborah C. Fowler
Texas Tech University, USA

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Background and Purpose

Even though the Generation Z cohort is larger than Generation Y, limited marketing research has been conducted on best practices in marketing to this generation. Limited studies have examined celebrity endorsements through social media and their effect on actual purchases. This study attempts to determine whether celebrity endorsements on social media effects the buying behavior of Generation Z.

Generation Z was born between 1994 and 2006 and represents 23 million U.S. consumers. This generation has \$44 billion in purchasing power and influences over \$600 billion of family spending (Bearne, 2015). They have never lived without the Internet and are accustomed to high-tech and multiple information sources such as social media (Benjamin, 2008). Gen Z is a significantly heavier user of social media platforms, not just in terms of the time they spend on them but also the number of platforms they use (Brands, 2017). Studies have found celebrities make Gen Z more receptive to advertising given their skepticism toward advertising and their attraction to branded content, therefore, formats like social media feeds and celebrity endorsements all score higher for this cohort than older generations (Brands, 2017).

Methodology

An online survey was developed to measure consumer's trustworthiness of celebrity endorsements, brand purchase intentions and purchase intentions for a celebrity endorsed product on social media. The Likert scale, nominal scale and open ended questions were adapted or modified from other studies (Wei & Lu, 2013; Malik & Guptha, 2014; and Carlson & Donovan, 2008). Undergraduate students from a major university in the southwestern United States were recruited using social media such as Facebook over a three-week period. Forty-seven respondents participated in the study, resulting in 34 usable responses for this study.

Analysis and Results

The data were analyzed using Qualtrics and Excel and the median was determined for the different Likert scale questions. The following three hypotheses were developed based on the literature review: H1. Generation Z will purchase a product that was endorsed by a celebrity on social media. A 7-point Likert scale with the end points of strongly disagree to strongly agree was used, the findings revealed a median of five indicated respondents somewhat agree they are more likely to make a purchase at a store endorsed by a celebrity.

H2. Celebrity endorser's trustworthiness effects Generation Z purchase intentions. A 5-point Likert scale was used with the end points of extremely important to not at all important. A median of four indicated that respondents felt trustworthiness of a celebrity endorsement is slightly important when making a purchase decision. H3. Celebrity endorsement will effect brand recognition purchase intentions. A 5-point Likert scale was used with the end points of extremely important to not at all important. A median of three showed that they were slightly likely to make a purchase. Nominal scale questions showed that 94% of respondents follow celebrities on their social media accounts and 50% of respondents had purchased a product after seeing a celebrity endorse the product on social media. Open ended questions revealed some of the main products endorsed by celebrities on social media which were then purchased were makeup, hair products, and teeth whitening products.

Findings and Conclusions

The findings revealed Generation Z is following celebrities on social media and buying products they endorse on social media. These results are similar to Wei and Lu (2013) who found that a celebrity endorsement online evoked more action from the consumer than did online customer reviews. Therefore, celebrity endorsements on social media have been found an effective form of marketing to evoke action/purchase decisions from Generation Z.

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